

"I was abruptly awakened by what sounded like an oncoming freight train. The next moment my world was literally turned completely on its side."



As I was on the concluding legs of my around-the-world voyage, I knew I was about to embark on the most dangerous section of it. After spending some peaceful time in the beautiful calm waters surrounding Bali, my

next major crossing was the Southern Indian Ocean. The biggest waves on the planet occur where the winds blow consistently strong and in the same direction. This is such a place. So it was with some hesitancy my mate and I left for this part of the journey.

Since the winds were quite strong, I opted to go with my heavy air rig. A heavily reefed main with staysail. I chose this rig because it had presented such a balanced and sturdy option when I faced previous passages of this nature. Yet, this was the first time where I really would understand exactly how beneficial it is.

After being awake most of the night, due to the heavy freighter traffic in the sea lanes we were sailing, it cleared up and we decided to call it a night. This, in spite of the heavy seas and strong winds. I had confidence in my Caliber as I was approaching the fifth year of my world voyage. My beloved Blue Alligator had always served me well. So at 0400, we went below to take a well deserved rest, quickly falling sound asleep. That's when it happened...

I was abruptly awakened by the roar of what sounded like an oncoming freight train. Before I had time to react, my world was

literally turned on its side. What used to be the cabin sole, was suddenly the vertical cabin side! I could hear the gigantic rush of water completely engulfing, knocking on beams end, and washing over Blue Alligator. In those seconds, I realized we were struck by a freak ocean wave. After rushing past, Blue Alligator immediately resumed her normal upright position.

In hearing, feeling, and knowing the full fury of that rogue wave, I quickly scrambled out of my berth. With heart racing I rushed topsides expecting the worst. I envisioned finding the deck washed clear of my mast, rigging, and sails.

I was shocked to see Blue Alligator happily sailing along with absolutely no sign of what had just transpired. It was then I understood, even more, the value of my heavy weather rig.

My rig presented a perfectly balanced sail plan that kept Blue Alligator from rolling off course where the wave could have done more damage. Plus, it's all inboard and high off the deck. The force of that giant wave simply washed entirely OVER Blue Alligator's deck and UNDER the sails!

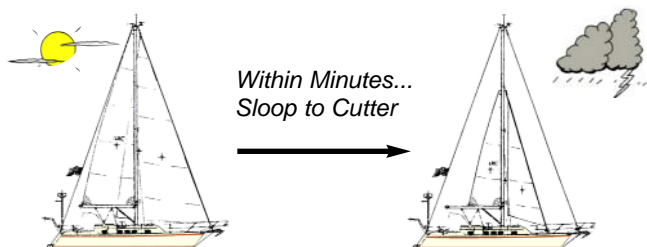
Furthermore, the strength of this rig was clear. With all the load points supporting the mast, it easily withstood the violent action caused by this breaking wave.

In recounting this story a few months later, I realized the significance of what I did next-- I went below, battened down the companionway, and went back to sleep. What better vote of confidence could there be.

--Christiane Thuraine SV Blue Alligator



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